DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 350 EA 019 558

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TITLE The Principal as White Knight.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 43p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Case Studies; *Educational Environment; Elementary Education; Expectation; *Leadership Qualities; *Principals; School Administration; *School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

This 20-month study describes an elementary school principal, John Meyer, and examines his leadership behaviors. From an effective schools perspective, the principal is seen as the white knight who "saves" the children by providing an effective school. John Meyer is known as a "turnaround" principal who came to Garvin School (located in a Missouri school district that had once served a predominantly white population but whose racial composition began to change in 1967) and transformed it from the "armpit of the district" to a good school. When this educator arrived, low student achievement, nonexistent discipline, and poor staff morale were the norm. Realizing that tackling all problems at once would yield minimal results, Meyer approached instructional improvement in four phases: discipline, achievement, attitude, and personnel. The paper details Meyer's approach, based on high expectations, a "good feeling" atmosphere, and close supervision. Next Meyer's leadership techniques are discussed, especially his organizational and communication skills. Meyer's approach exemplifies T. J. Sergiovanni's model of leadership based on five forces: technical, human, substantive, symbolic, and cultural. In this model, which refutes the assumption that any person trained in good management and human relations can lead an organization, the first three forces are esssential for a competent organization, and the last two are necessary for excellence. The present study provides a large database for assessing and validating Sergiovanni's leadership model. (MLH)

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THE PRINCIPAL AS WHITE KNIGHT

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
Washington, D.C., 1987

EA 019 558

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THE PRINCIPAL AS WHITE KNIGHT

"This is what we are about. This is why we are here."
-John Meyer at the first staff meeting of the year

"John Meyer is like a boss I once had; he can dress up in a bunny rabbit suit, but you still know he is the boss. Not everyone can pull that off."

-Hal Barnes, Central Office Administrator

"I view John Meyer as an anchor. He sets the tone well and lets us know what he expects. He runs the school, not with a heavy hand, but he is in charge and I appreciate that."

-Fran Matthews, classroom teacher

"He's nice. He gives people equal chances. He's understanding. You can tell him something, he'll try to understand."

-Brenda Marks, fifth grade student

" I found he's pretty fair. He's easy to see, he'll take the time to talk with you. You don't need an appointment."

-Fern Andrews, parent

This study describes an elementary school principal, John Meyer, and examines his leader behaviors. The study began in January, 1983, and continued through the 1984-85 school year. The purpose of the study was an effort to delineate more clearly what Edmonds (1979) and others in the effective schools movement have described as "strong" leadership. From this perspective, the principal is seen as the white knight who "saves" the children by providing an effective school. Just as knights in the Middle Ages were known to help the feeble, and fight injustice and evil with good, so John Meyer is viewed as a "turnaround" principal who came to Garvin School and changed it from "the armpit of the district" to an "effective" school.

The investigator typically spent three days a week at the school, two mornings and one full day each week. There were weeks when the investigator was present for the entire school day everyday. In addition, evening parent meetings, administrators' meetings, and staff meetings were also observed. During the earliest stages of the study, the investigator was a participant as well as an observer, acting in the role of administrative intern. Varied duties were performed with John Meyer's guidance for approximately five months. The later stages of the study saw the investigator in the role of observer rather than participant.

During the twenty months that John Meyer was the focus of this study, the investigator kept anecdotal notes in a

daily journal, examined school files and records, interviewed parents, students, teachers, former employees, and central office personnel. In addition, surveys were conducted to gather information on a number of topics including the teacher observation and evaluation process. John Meyer was observed in a variety of settings and activities over a long period of time. He was interviewed many times both formally about his beliefs, values, educational philosophy, background,and experiences, and informally as situations occurred. He was asked why he spoke or acted as he did in particular situations. Approximately eight hundred pages of handwritten field notes focusing on actual observations were collected together with the survey results, copies of letters and reports, and other artifacts related to the study.

The history of John Meyer's leadership as it developed over time was examined retrospectively along with the history of Garvin School. The historical perspective provided a clearer picture of the organizational context within which this leader acted. Specific leader behaviors observed during the course of the study could be analyzed not only in the present context, but with knowledge of the past and prior events that possibly could have a significant effect on current actions.

Garvin School - A Brief History

Garvin Elementary School is located in a large midwestern metropolitan area in the Garrett School District.

The district is divided by an interstate highway. Predominantly white, more affluent neighborhoods are located north of the highway. Some integrated neighborhoods and poor black sections are located south of the highway. The school district was formed from three separate school districts as the result of a court ordered desegregation plan. Garvin Elementary School is located on the extreme southern edge of the district.

Garvin School was built in the mid 1950s and served an area of single family homes in a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood. The school was generally regarded as a good school without serious problems. The school remained much the same throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1967, the racial composition of the district began to change very slowly and a few black families moved into the attendance area of Garvin School. At this time, the quiet and easy-going principal of Garvin School transferred to another school.

The new principal stayed three years and was described as a "tightwad" by teachers who worked with him. He left Garvin for a job in business. The next principal assigned to Garvin did purchase supplies and equipment for the school, but according to teachers who worked with him, that was about all he was able to do. This individual was viewed as a "nice" person who tried hard, but who lacked leadership skills. He felt that teachers should be responsible for discipline and

he had no master plan. When students were sent to the office for misbehavior, they just laughed at the principal. Garvin School's third principal suffered from ill health and was temporarily replaced by a consultant in the district.

In 1972, Garvin School was characterized by many discipline problems, low test scores, and a negative reputation within the district. An administrator in the central office described the feelings of teachers in the district when he stated that "any school located south of Highway 150 was viewed as a combat zone." Other descriptors of Garvin School included "the armpit of the district" and a "dumping grounds for teachers" who were not succeeding at other schools. Teachers who taught at Garvin during that time described it as "rough" with "lots of problems." One teacher related his own experience when he arrived at Garvin School in November to replace a teacher leaving because of a nervous breakdown. He was met with signs hanging from his sixth grade classroom windows which said GO HOME. He found "kids in control and I had to establish myself as an authority figure even to the point of defending myself physically." In his words, "it was a fight to survive." At that point in the history of Garvin School, it was "every man for himself."

In 1973, John Meyer was assigned the principalship of Garvin School and it is at this stage that the examination of John Meyer as the leader of an organization begins. In order to examine John Meyer as a leader, it is necessary to examine

first John Meyer, the man.

John Meyer - The Man

John Meyer, a tall man with an easy smile, was forty-one years old when he arrived at Garvin School. He was an only child who lived with his parents and grandparents in a small town in Arkansas. He worked as a boy in the store his parents owned. At an early age, he developed a love for horses which exists today as evidenced by the many horse related pictures and articles found in his office.

John Meyer was sent home from school the first day of first grade for using inappropriate language. He failed the sixth grade and ran away twice during his adolescent years. His early experiences did not prevent him from doing well in high school. He was president of his senior class and a member of the debate team. He received his bachelor's degree in 1956 and a master's degree in 1964. He also completed additional graduate work for administrative certification.

John Meyer's grandfather was a particularly strong influence in his life. His grandfather was a doctor and a store owner, who at the age of twenty-one, started first grade in a one room schoolhouse and went on to learn to speak four languages. His grandfather was perhaps responsible for the influence religion has upon John Meyer, because it was under his grandfather's tutelage that John Meyer began to examine the Bible. He completed two years of ministerial training and has served as a part-time minister periodically

since 1950. The church is an important part of John Meyer's life and is included as an integral part of his resume.

John Meyer speaks with a country flavor and often sprinkles his conversation with expressions that bring to mind his rural upbringing. His speech is grammatically correct, but the "country-fied manner of speaking seems incongruous with the intelligence and astuteness" a person discovers to be there after talking with him for only a short while.

John Meyer began his professional career as a sixth grade teacher in the Garrett School District. He taught for thirteen years and then applied for the position as assistant principal. He was offered a principalship at Lenox School, a small school with ten teachers and an enrollment of about three hundred students. He was principal there for four years before the assistant superintendent offered him the position at Garvin School. John Meyer at this time was having doubts about his effectiveness as a principal, primarily because Lenox School no longer provided a challenge or as John Meyer expressed it, "It got where it wasn't fun anymore and I asked for a transfer."

John Meyer came to observe Garvin School and found the challenge he needed. He accepted the job and became the principal in 1973. What he found at Garvin was certainly different from what he had left at Lenox where the school in effect "ran itself." As John Meyer recollected, "the first

month I was here, I dreamt I died and went to hell, but that wasn't where I was, I was at Garvin School."

It is now possible to begin to examine the actions of this educator coming from a rural, religious background with a real need for challenge in his work. He arrived at the "armpit of the district" where student achievement was low, discipline almost non-existent, and the morale of the staff very low.

Actions of a Leader

With the realization that all the problems needed immediate attention, Meyer decided that to tackle them all would result in little or no improvement. His belief that "you must have discipline in order for learning to occur" directed him to his first task. He believed that "with learning comes achievement and once a person has begun to achieve, he develops mental health, a positive attitude." Meyer approached the improvement of instruction at Garvin in four areas: discipline, achievement, attitude, and personnel.

Discipline

Over a period of years, Meyer was able to work with the staff to develop a consistent approach to discipline which held students responsible for their own actions. When teachers were interviewed during the course of the study, 85% of them voluntarily stated, without specific questioning, that the discipline plan was perhaps John Meyer's "greatest contribution." According to staff members, the discipline

plan at Garvin School works because "kids know what is expected. The kids know John Meyer cares about them, knows who they are, and that makes a difference. Love, praise, and concern as well as discipline" are found at Garvin School. Excerpts from a parent letter and a letter from a former student exemplify this balance of love and discipline:

> . . . Bob and I wanted to say "Thank you" for another year of effort, interest, patience and concern. We know it takes all these things and more to be a principal and shoulder the responsibility of part-time father role to so many.

> Dear Mr. Meyer
> I miss you very much. I wish I could see you. I am writing this letter with the good news pencil you gave me. I live in apartments here now. Tell Mrs. Smith I said HI and love her and I love you to. Thank you for everything you done for us. . . .

The support staff at Garvin also perceive that balance of discipline and genuine caring for the child. The custodian who was at Garvin when Meyer arrived said that "it was terrible the first couple of years, lots of fights, real disorderly kids. He's done a lot. The kids toe the line and there are no real problems. They respect authority." The nurse who shares her time among several buildings describes the students: "kids here are great, neatest, most respectful." She believes that Meyer's expectations regarding the kids at Garvin can be stated simply: "love 'em to death." The counselor shared her perceptions regarding Meyer and his major strength as she views him. "He's wild about kids,

believes in them and believes they can overcome. He tells us that 'these kids are the best that the parents can send us; don't badmouth them.'"

Meyer states very clearly and consistently that he makes decisions based on "what is the best for the child." He has high expectations for student behavior and has incorporated his concern for the child within the discipline plan. The district policy on discipline is followed with paddling and suspension used when needed. Meyer's belief is that a consistent approach, with clearly defined expectations for the students to be responsible for their own actions is an approach that will work, especially over a period of time. Students who begin their schooling at Garvin have fewer problems than students new to the school. Meyer's explanation: "The longer they sit in a hen house, the more like chickens they become." He does not agree with the commonly held aphorism that "kids will be kids." John Meyer's belief is that "kids will be what we expect them to be."

Achievement

Curriculum and instruction were two areas which concerned Meyer when he arrived at Garvin. Among the many problems he found were a lack of services for learning disabled students, an unwieldy mathematics program housed in twelve file cabinets in the halls, and a system for placing students in reading groups that was haphazard at best.

Meyer secured the services of district consultants to

help him address these problems. New materials were purchased. Parents were informed of the changes taking place at Garvin and the reasons why the changes were occurring. Meyer's efforts in curriculum and instruction continued throughout his tenure at Garvin. He was instrumental in the development of a home reading program that required parental involvement, signed contracts, and rewards for successful completion of the eight week program. Another program that was developed in response to a specific need was a task completion program for students in grades two through six, which rewarded students who completed all assignments on time. Meyer was directly involved in this program with classroom visits each Friday to congratulate students who had completed their assignments.

Meyer monitors the instructional program at Garvin through his involvement in the instructional management system (IMS) used in the district, and his work with grouping and class lists. He also holds conferences with teachers about specific instructional concerns and he stays informed concerning the resource room services provided by special education staff. When he sees a problem instructionally, he works with the teacher to see that it is solved. One instance in particular involved a resource room teacher who was not meeting the specific instructional needs of the students assigned to her. Meyer conferenced with her about the concerns, directed her to develop a plan to meet those needs,

and followed up persistently. He refused to accept excuses from the teacher for her lack of progress, and conferenced with the teacher throughout the year until the problem was solved by the teacher, but with considerable pushing and persistence from Meyer.

Meyer works closely with the counselor to review building level achievement and examine test scores. Standardized tests used by the district over the years have changed, so comparisons between one test and another are difficult. Generally, test scores for Garvin were in the 30th to 40th percentile range in the early years, based on the Gates MacGinitie Reading test scores. Test results for Garvin were generally the lowest of the seventeen elementary schools in grades one, two, and three. Scores for grades four, five, and six were third or fourth from the bottom of the list of all schools.

Over the years, test scores have improved as measured by the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The latest scores available, from the tests administered in the spring of 1985, range from a low of 40th percentile on the fifth grade reading subtest to a high of 75th percentile on the second grade math subtest. Most scores were above the 50th percentile range.

The staff at Garvin express pride in their accomplishments in the areas of achievement and insruction. When Garvin performed as well as it did in the spring of

1983, a district official made the statement that "something must be wrong with the test if Garvin did so well." Even after ten years of change and improvement, Garvin School's past was not forgotten.

Attitude

Meyer wanted Garvin School to be a positive place for students and staff. He addressed the two areas of discipline and achievement, because he believed that with good discipline would come learning and achievement. The sense of accomplishment that comes from achievement is conducive to a positive attitude. Meyer modeled a positive approach with students and staff and expected the same from them.

The following statement was made at the very first staff meeting of the school year and is typical of Meyer's positive expectations:

> There should be a good feeling when you step into this school. Make sure that there is a warm, friendly smile to greet children so they'll know this is the best thing to happen to them. Be sure what happens to them is good for them. Our theme for the year is motivation and time on task. We will make a difference in the life of our children. Teachers must not only make them feel good, but also motivate them and keep them on task.

Two specific examples of the positive approach that Meyer began in the early years at Garvin are the career education program and the "good news" program. In the career education program, students apply for jobs, interview, punch a time clock, perform jobs, and earn money which can be spent at the school store. In the "good news" program, a different

student is selected each day by a classroom teacher to be sent to the office, so that Meyer can call the child's parents to tell them what good behavior or work their son or daughter has been doing.

There is a pervading emphasis on positive regard for the child at Garvin School. Meyer expects this without exception from the staff. He shares his expectations through his words and his actions. Meyer in his very own "country" way explained the power of a positive approach with children:

> Ever since I was eight years old, I had a horse and I have got to tell you this, I thought to train 'em you had to brain 'em. I'd hit 'em with a piece of wood. I never won a trophy until 1973 when I learned to reward a horse's behavior and you get better results. The thing that made the difference was I had a good girl mare that would give you her heart. She won't respond to hits and she doesn't relate to licks. I'm not saying kids are like horses. I know how I feel when I get a positive comment; so do you; it motivates you. If you build on the positive side, there are fewer misbehaviors, fewer in the office, they'll learn more, and you'll go home happier.

Personnel

Meyer sought to accomplish the goals he had set for Garvin School in a number of ways. One approach was to work closely with the staff. Garvin School was known throughout the district as the "dumping grounds" for incompetent teachers. With the support and assistance of the central office, Meyer was responsible for the dismissal or transfer of eleven staff members during the first five years at Garvin. According to Meyer, these teachers were either

incompetent or blatantly refused to follow district policies. Meyer worked with a number of other teachers who needed improvement, rather than dismissing them. The central office recognized Meyer's ability to work with staff: "John Meyer is stubborn; he will work with a teacher who has potential and won't give up. He has straightened out more staff and made good professional teachers of them. Some are on his staff now."

Meyer had the ability to discern where his efforts would be more productive, working with a teacher to improve teaching effectiveness, or beginning and carefully following through on the dismissal procedures. In both instances, he sought to help the individual. Even during the dismissal process, Meyer provided assistance for improvement and if the teacher was unable to improve, sought employment counseling and help for the teacher.

In one instance, the teacher was close to retirement and Meyer, together with district officials, persuaded her to take an early retirement and paid her the remaining contract salary. Another teacher was a non-tenured teacher who had received two written warnings concerning the appropriate way to discipline students in his PE classes. When he paddled all twenty six students, he was fired by the district. Excerpts from a letter written by a former teacher who was counseled out of the teaching profession provide a glimpse of Meyer's actions and concern in a difficult situation:

> . . .It must seem strange to you that I am writing to you! As you may know, I have had several bouts with a chemical imbalanced caused depression. . . . I, so well, remember your advice to me at my last evaluation, when you said I better get some professional advice, before I wind up blowing my brains out! I was on the verge of that type of thing. . . . We had our conflicts, for sure, but you did me the biggest favor you could have. Indirectly, because of you, I am alive to write and thank you from the bottom of my heart. . . .

Meyer's willingness to address staff deficiencies and take the appropriate actions could have earned him the reputation as a hatchet man, and he is perhaps viewed by some teachers in that way. Those teachers who were at Garvin during Meyer's first years there shared their perceptions of Meyer's actions. One teacher who began her contacts with Garvin School in the 1950s said that "Mr. Meyer had a big job when he came . He decided he wanted to change the district reputation of Garvin. His weeding out the staff was the most positive thing. He put forth lots of effort on his own. Some people may think he's unfair, but in most cases he's not too far off." Another teacher who came to Garvin three years after Meyer had her differences with him during the early years. She feels more comfortable with him now, but does not unreservedly sing his praises. She does believe that "he really is trying to help you" but says that other teachers feel John Meyer is "out to get you." The counselor who began at Garvin the year after Meyer, states "John Meyer's evaluations are honest. He works with shaky people. He is not a hatchet man. He is knowledgeable about curriculum, teaching

techniques, and shares it, models it."

In order to provide an excellent staff at Garvin, Meyer not only seeks to have poor teachers removed from Garvin, but he also actively seeks quality staff members. The counselor reported that when Meyer found good staff: " He really went after Kathy Jenkins." Jenkins was an excellent classroom teacher who interviewed with Meyer and was offered a contract at the interview. In another instance Meyer needed an additional teacher after the school year had begun. He talked many times with the assistant superintendent for personnel, Hal Barnes, who refused to grant Meyer's request for an additional teacher. His decision was based upon some incorrect enrollment figures and neither Meyer nor Barnes were aware that they were using different figures. Meyer and Dave Harris, another principal, were both interested in Susan Grimes for a teaching position. After numerous phone calls, memos, and conversations, the discrepancy in numbers was discovered and Meyer was permitted to hire an additional teacher. His comments: "I cannot tell you how many hours I spent on this project. I will get her before Dave Harris does if I have to camp out in Hal Barnes' office." Meyer did call Susan Grimes directly from Barnes' office as soon as he received the word to hire.

Another aspect of Meyer's concern with personnel and the provision of a quality teaching staff at Garvin is his interest and involvement in staff development. Meyer is

interested in current research and practices and seeks in-service opportunities for his staff. The weekly staff meetings are used for staff development. Teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for these meetings along with Meyer. As an example, Meyer began looking at the information coming from Madeline Hunter before the district as a whole became interested. He began sharing information about effective teaching strategies informally or as he put it: "I primed the pump for two years before we went there seriously to drink. It seems well received."

Meyer spends many hours in the individual classrooms observing and giving feedback to the teachers. Teachers are encouraged to identify their own areas of weakness and develop plans to strengthen those areas with assistance from Meyer as needed. The counselor described the process: "There is a great deal of trust. He is candid with me and he shares criticisms professionally, not personally. His goal is to keep me at my best to give the highest level of service to students and parents. He is not tactless or cruel, but direct. He has creative and innovative plans and is like a team member with a totally fresh perspective. He has insight into kids. I've never worked with anyone who does it as well as he does."

The same teacher who had difficulty with Meyer in the early years and is somewhat reserved in her statements about him said " Meyer is on top of everything; he doesn't tell you

about minor things, he likes to let you handle it first, but is there to help you."

Meyer views classroom observations as separate from the evaluation process even though in reality they are a definite part of the evaluation process. His belief is that the classroom observation is done to provide the teacher with specific feedback regarding teaching performance, so that each teacher can grow professionally and improve the instruction that occurs daily in the classrooms.

Techniques of a Leader

Meyer set out to improve instruction and the educational program at Garvin School. In order to address the variety of needs, ranging from discipline and achievement to attitude and personnel, Meyer used two techniques to achieve the goals he had set. The first technique was the use of organizational skills whereby he managed time, people, and resources effectively. The other technique was an approach to human interactions so that ideas were effectively communicated to others. An examination of these techniques can add another dimension to John Meyer's leader behaviors. These techniques clarify not only what happened at Garvin School, but also how it happened.

Organizational Skills

When faced with a task, Meyer develops a clearly defined plan to accomplish the task. He makes use of a typed form upon which he will list the steps for accomplishing a task,

the persons responsible, the materials needed, and the time needed for completion. At the end of one school year, Garvin was faced with serious overcrowding and Meyer was asked by the district office to develop a plan to solve the problem. He developed Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C, each worked out in detail with variations in possible requirements accounted for in each plan.

He looks ahead and plans for future needs and he does not always use orthodox methods to do so. For example, Meyer believed he needed sixteen regular classroom teachers to staff the building one year, but he was only allowed fifteen. In assigning teachers to grade levels, he chose to assign them in such a way that he would be able to build a strong case for an additional teacher. In addition, he kept a sixteenth room available for occupancy rather than using it for another program. When offered an aide, Meyer refused that solution. When asked by a board member about the situation, he was direct in the statement of needs. Although he had no involvement in the assignment of a substitute to one of the overcrowded classrooms one day, Meyer expressed his delight that that particular substitute had been sent to the crowded class. The substitute was a relative of a school board member and she expressed concern about the size of the class. In his reflections upon his unorthodox methods, Meyer commented that he knew the assistant superintendent for instruction, Clarence Beck, " doesn't trust me with all my wheelin' and

dealin' when I need something."

Meyer makes effective use of the talents of other people to accomplish tasks. He allows the PE, art, and music teachers to develop the schedules for their programs. Classroom teachers coordinate recess schedules with each other after receiving the schedule for lunch and special classes. When making budget decisions, particularly in regard to textbook orders, Meyer has each teacher or each grade level order individually on separate purchase orders so that when the books arrive, they are delivered to a specific teacher rather than having all books delivered to the office for counting and sorting. Meyer sets limits in such a way when he delegates tasks that he can accept the results of the delegation. He provides input in both scheduling and textbook orders when he sees a specific need to do so.

On a daily basis, Meyer employs some management strategies that allow him the time and energy to devote his efforts to areas he perceives as important rather than to the multitude of details that require his attention each day. He employs his secretary in such a way that his tasks are ordered and presented in a timely fashion.

One example is his file folder system which he began using after a district in-service on time management. Folders are numbered consecutively one to thirty-one for each day in a month. As requests for his efforts or information for his use cross his desk, he quickly decides to deal with the task

immediately or marks the item with a "ff23" indicating into which folder his secretary should place the task. Items are placed according to the time needed for completion. For example, if the central office needed a minority student report concerning discipline by the fifteenth of the month, the request for that information may be placed in the folder marked "ten" to allow him the time to complete the task without having the memo sit on his desk for days, and stand the chance of becoming misplaced. Each morning, his secretary places the day's file folder upon John Meyer's desk for his quick perusal early each day. Those are his scheduled tasks for the day.

Another managerial strategy used by John Meyer is the weekly bulletin dictated to his secretary and distributed to the staff each Friday. The bulletin contains schedules for the week, any special activities, regularly scheduled bus and recess duties, lunch menus, announcements, and perhaps a journal article or item of interest Meyer wants to share with the staff. The bulletin replaces a weekly staff meeting and keeps teachers informed of particular concerns that change throughout the school year. The publication of this bulletin allows time typically used at a staff meeting for announcements to be used instead for staff development.

In addition to concrete examples of management, Meyer also makes use of management strategies that are not as easily seen. He strongly believes that the teachers at Garvin

should take responsibility for their own problems. This does not mean that Meyer refuses to listen or to help. Quite the contrary, he is available when needed, provides suggestions and encouragement, and sets definite appointments with teachers to review their progress in solving a problem. His view is similar to that described in the Harvard Business Review article, "Management time: Who's got the monkey?" (Oncken and Wass, 1974), which states that a subordinate should not come into the leader's office with a problem and leave, having deposited the problem with the leader or "put the monkey on your back."

Meyer's ability to control the time spent in a conference by his subtle use of body language is another strategy not easily discerned. He manages to allow the person enough time to talk and express concerns and yet, at the same time, insure that the time spent in an unplanned conference or interaction will not infringe upon the time needed for other tasks. Meyer is able to get up from his chair, walk someone to the door, and end the conversation before that person realizes that the conversation is over.

John Meyer manages time effectively through his orderly approach to task accomplishment. He manages people effectively by delegating tasks and responsibilities based upon a knowledge of the difficulty of the task and the ability of the persons responsible. He spends time planning and organizing so that his efforts are well thought out and

productive. He utilizes his time and his energies in such a way that the day-to-day requirements for running a school are handled in a routine and ordered manner that is both effective and efficient.

Human Interactions

John Meyer does not interact with others in a haphazard fashion with little thought given to daily contacts with people. Meyer analyzes interactions and plans his contacts with others so that their feelings and needs are considered as well as his own. One way Meyer insures that interactions with others are productive is his consideration of timing. Meyer says "timing is a subtle thing; timing is most important in dealing with people. If timing is off, it can backfire just like a car and things run rough. If you help others get what they want, then you can get what you want." In one instance, Meyer had a concern about a teacher's use of incorrect grammar in the classroom. He wanted to approach her with that concern, but decided to wait for another opportunity since he was aware of some personal problems that were at a crisis stage for her. With the problems she was facing on a personal level, she would have been unable to handle Meyer's concern at a professional level.

Meyer employs a technique he calls "calculated neglect." Meyer sees this as his "greatest strength, the ability to put things on hold, to wait and see, later to get more information. It may be defined by others as not doing the

job, but eventually I get around to doing what's best. We tend to be emotional so calculated neglect leaves it on your mind so you can think it through." Meyer does not make quick emotional responses to others when he communicates with them. His calculated neglect could be described as careful consideration when viewed from a different perspective.

Meyer's interactions with others are flavored by his country expressions, his own brand of humor, which at times has been described as "barnyard humor," and his delight in doing something different and out of the ordinary. He seeks to make an impression on others and is not reluctant to be flamboyant in his words and actions. When he was experiencing frustration in his dealings with Hal Barnes and the request for an additional teacher, Meyer called Barnes and said "Something's in my craw and you're going to hear it." When he was present at an administrators' meeting where tensions were high and the atmosphere was less than cordial because of changes in teacher evaluations, reduction in force, school closings, and changes made by a new superintendent, Meyer commented to the principals sitting close to him: "Look at the group dynamics at work here, sort of like maggots making love in dead Ernest. This place is buggy."

Meyer's sense of humor, whether it is appreciated or not, allows others to see him as a person with feelings of his own. Although Meyer is generally able to handle difficult situations in a professional, and perhaps even a detached

manner, such is not always the case. One spring the teachers at Garvin were involved in a strike together with other teachers throughout the district. Meyer himself says he took the strike very personally and pulled away from his staff after the strike was over. A teacher who was there at the time says that Meyer "closed his door for weeks at a time; he took it very personally and wasn't rational. Even the following year he remembered and things were strained." This teacher approached Meyer at this point and "talked directly and rationally about the good of the school. He's a human being just like the rest of us."

Another aspect of Meyer's interactions with others is simply his enjoyment of the reactions of others when he does something unusual. He is not afraid to do something that could be viewed as acting with less than a professional demeanor by others if he sees a legitimate purpose for doing it. An example of such an action was Meyer's wearing a Miss Piggy costume, complete with satin dress, beads, and wig, as he rode into each classroom in the building on a motorcycle. The purpose of this performance was to motivate the students to participate in the winter home reading program. Miss Piggy was just one of a series of characters through the years who have been employed to kick off the annual program.

Another example of Meyer's appreciation of the unusual occurs every year at Halloween when the Headless Horseman arrives on his black horse, head in hand. The students are

gathered on the large playground field with eerie music playing, to await the arrival of the Headless Horseman. Squeals of laughter and delight are heard as the students watch horse and rider gallop around the field. Parents with younger brothers and sisters are there with cameras. Before disappearing, the Horseman lifts his cape to reveal his identity - John Meyer, of course.

Meyer himself delights in telling of his Halloween exploits. He visits other schools in the district with and without invitations. One of Meyer's favorite stories is of an unannounced visit to a neighboring parochial school, after which he called the principal to see if she too had been "bothered" by a horseman and to tell her that he was going to report the problem to the police.

Meyer's ability to communicate and interact with others in a variety of ways and on a variety of levels is one technique which he uses to accomplish the goals viewed as important for Garvin School. He can relate to others on a professional level or a personal level as the situation requires.

Perceptions of a Leader

The way in which the actions of a leader are perceived by others may be as important as the actions themselves. How is John Meyer perceived by others? What do others think about his actions and the way he runs Garvin School? John Meyer is not a simple individual who can be described by a general

statement. His leader behaviors are perceived differently according to each person's relationship to and contacts with him.

Typically central office personnel view Meyer as a competent, efficient, effective administrator who is somewhat of a con man:

> Meyer literally had to shake that school up and turn it around and he did. He's generally recognized in the district as being very effective. Other principals would throw up their hands and say keep the kids for six and one half hours and do the best we can, but John Meyer doesn't. He's kind of a missionary type. He's one of the best organized principals; he's a manager, on top of details; he's ready to start school and that isn't always the case in other buildings.
>
> John Meyer is persistent. He will push for kids. I know sometimes he's giving me the con story and I work around it. I'd rather have that though than someone waiting until the building is falling down around them.

Meyer's colleagues view him as a competent administrator who is not afraid to speak his mind. Some of his peers do not share his flair for the flamboyant, but accept it as John's style. One middle school principal who worked with Meyer on several committees pointed out that "he expresses his feelings if he's opposed; he does it tactfully and in good spirit. I've always appreciated that." An elementary principal views Meyer as "strong, with definite ideas about what he wants. He's a little more aggressive than I would be. He's got a lot of ham in him and has done some creative things that have brought him into the limelight."

Teachers who have worked with John Meyer view him in one

of two ways. Those teachers who have confidence in their own abilities and who share Meyer's high expectations for students view him as an informed professional who truly cares about students and staff. Teachers who are insecure in their professional abilities view Meyer as a threat and are fearful of him. Of particular interest are the views of those teachers who began working with Meyer during the early years at Garvin and who have remained there and observed the changes that took place. One such teacher described her view of Meyer:

> That first year we locked horns. He was on my back constantly. I had never taught blacks prior to this and it was a total new experience. Things began to fall in place the second year; began liking school. He's mellowed now, he's willing to listen. I still call him Mr. Meyer though and not John or JM like others do. During those early years I hated John Meyer's guts and he hated mine. Now I feel comfortable with him and I like being here.

Another teacher who has been at Garvin for a number of years wrote in a statement that she mailed to the investigator:

> Leadership style - has mellowed - I considered him a tyrant. Has good ideas, programs, etc. abilities are great. His style lacks positive leadership qualities at times. If he has it in for you, you feel it - rides various people - at times insincere - belittles.

Excerpts from letters sent to John Meyer at the end of one school year are included to share the perceptions of teachers who view Meyer differently.

> You are so human, so "real"; I appreciate that quality in you. I've enjoyed your sense of humor,

> to remind me to exercise mine. You have the rare ability to combine common sense and professional expertise with compassion, leading this school in a direction toward which it can proudly stand among the best.
>
> It was a fantastic year for me. Like I told you, it was the only year I've taught that I've hated to see end. A large part of the reason I felt that way was because of the challenge you presented to me, the opportunities you allowed me, and the support that you gave me. . . .You are a wonderful principal to work with and I just want you to know how great I think you are!

John Meyer's former secretary presented him with a certificate when she worked with him that read: "Certificate of Recognition presented to John Meyer in recognition of being SUPERMAN with just enough Clark Kent in him to be truly human."

Parents generally view John Meyer as a good person, fair, and available when they need him. When parents were interviewed about Mr. Meyer the comments ranged from "I don't know him very well." to "Oh, Mr. Meyer's great; I've never met a nicer man. He takes time with the kids at Halloween, is super nice."

Students were also interviewed and asked about Mr. Meyer. The responses indicated that students view Meyer as a "nice" man who "paddles kids or calls them to the office for good news. He comes to the rooms a lot and gives out pencils."

The Leader's Perceptions of Himself

Of interest also is the way John Meyer sees himself as a leader. He reflected upon his leadership style, his

accomplishments, and his regrets in both an interview and a written survey where he completed the same questions that others were asked to complete about him. Additional insights were gained from a speech he made to Garvin staff and students in June, 1985, when he announced his transfer to another school. When asked to reflect upon his twelve years at Garvin and list five of his greatest accomplishments and five of his biggest regrets, Meyer said that he believed his accomplishments were the improvement in discipline, the home reading program, the task completion program, teacher in-service, and an improved image for Garvin School.

Meyer listed his regrets or areas of disappointment in two categories, the things he could have changed and the things over which he had no control. His first regret was the lack of a good steady secretary through the years. The first secretary left of her own choice because of personal reasons, the second was only at Garvin for one year and was cut by the district from the staff over the summer. The third secretary was still with Meyer and planned to accompany him to the new school.

The second regret was a desire to avoid the stigma of doing a necessary job that affects the relationship between home and school, specifically the lost public support of parents when Meyer had to report them for child abuse. Two instances in particular disturbed Meyer because he knew the parents personally and welcomed their involvement in the

school. Those contacts made it difficult for Meyer to act as a mandated reporter.

The three regrets which Meyer felt he could have avoided dealt with personnel, instruction, and leadership. Meyer regretted that he did not get rid of a particular teacher "for the kids' sakes." She had been at Garvin, was transferred, and then returned. She retired in 1985, after refusing offers of an early retirement. "I tried to bring in a sub for the rest of the year; I had a little plan which she didn't buy, needless to say. She just couldn't take throwing in the towel, her self respect, and feelings about the teaching profession. I had a lot of mixed feelings, Hal Barnes said we could terminate her and put her on summative. I didn't want to do her out of her retirement. She truly loves the kids and is a mother hen." The next regret was "not starting retentions earlier. It's only been the last four years that we've had a formal planned retention program." Meyer's last regret was a wish that he had used a less dictatorial style the first two years and instead used more shared decision making. Meyer stated " I turned some people off that first year or so. I was aware that we didn't have a cooperative working relationship, I was more condemning than praising. I couldn't see the good for the bad then."

When Meyer completed his survey he described his own leadership style with a list of eight characteristics: (1) assertive, but cautious, (2) involves people in shared

decision making process, (3) strong in staff in-service, (4) relies on example to inspire others, (5) "showmanship", (6) tries to blend people, things, ideas, (7) values unity and a positive atmosphere, and (8) ability to delegate. Meyer saw himself with six strengths: (1) ideas, alternative solutions, formulating viable change, (2) ability to work with people and involve them in productive work, (3) uses staff to accomplish instructional goals, (4) staff inservice, teaching skills, (5) time manager, and (6)good human relation skills. He listed his weaknesses as (1) written communications, (2) program assessment to determine effectiveness including evaluation of existing programs and (3) a need for approval.

Meyer's written response to the question "What is your perception of JM as a principal?" was:

> He is a principal who enjoys his job. He encourages and accepts people. Accessible to people. A person who works to create an atmosphere where people can "get themselves done." A willingness to try new programs. Shows interest and enthusiasm for the job. There is a driving desire to achieve a sense of "self-actualization." The final decision is "what is best for the student." Develops systems for time management. Maintains emotional balance by creating and using many support systems.

During a student assembly the last day of school in June, 1985, the students presented performances, class by class, as they said good-bye to Mr. Meyer who was going to a different school in the fall. They presented him with a horse blanket and a bridle and reins. After John Meyer thanked them for their performances and gifts he began talking directly to

the students:

> You are the hardest group to say I won't be here next year. I love you and I care about you and I always will. Continue to try hard and work on your assignments. Try to please your teacher. . . . I do not want to see a good brain wasted. I almost wasted mine. I didn't like school; the first grade I ran off five times, I got kicked out of school and sent home to my mother. I failed sixth grade 'cause I didn't try. In high school I ran away two times. Some one person took an interest in me. This individual, my grandfather, said he was going to help me. He was quite old to have a hard headed teen, but he did because he knew that it was a terrible thing to waste a mind. His dad died a drunk. When my grandfather was twenty-one, he'd never been to school in his life and someone spit on him and said there goes a Meyer - never was one of them that amounted to anything. At twenty-one, he went to first grade and sat down in a classroom to get some learning.. he became a teacher and a doctor and a lawyer and a minister and he told me this story. You can be whatever you want to be. He wanted me to be a preacher. I graduated from twelfth grade and preached for three years at revivals. I never liked to preach though. I went back to school to be a teacher. I feel like you're my church. In my own way of ministering, right or wrong, you're the greatest bunch God could have given me to work with. One person made a difference in my life. I hope someone's made a difference in yours so you can make a difference in someone else's. Thank you.

Summary

This study of John Meyer was conducted to explicate leader behaviors that might describe a "strong" leader. Edmonds' (1979) work suggested that "strong leadership" was one of the characteristics of effective schools. His work did not further describe what was meant by the term and the reported research did not reflect use of standard measures of leadership, such as the LBDQ XII. The careful observing and

recording of the behaviors of a person occupying a leader position, in an organization which was in disarray, provided one way to give more descriptive meaning to the term "strong leadership."

An analysis of most extant leadership or leader behavior theories suggests that effective leaders are those who exhibit "task" oriented or "initiating structure" behaviors in combination with "relationship" oriented or "consideration" behaviors (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). In various ways such perspectives as Hersey and Blanchard (1977), House (1971), and Fiedler (1967) deal with these two primary sets of behaviors. These perspectives, however, have a reductionist flavor. All that good leaders need are technical management skills and human relation skills. Little, if any, reference is made to the substantive, symbolic, and cultural aspects of organizations and the role that leaders play in such matters. The implication of these theories is that with technical and human skills, any leader could lead any type of organization.

It is a questionable assumption that any person trained in good management and human relation skills can lead any organization. Sergiovanni (1984) has questioned this assumption and proposed a model of leadership made up of five "forces": (a) technical, (b) human, (c) substantive, (d) symbolic, and (e) cultural.

In Sergiovanni's model the first three forces are what

is necessary for a competent organization. The technical leader is described as a management engineer who is knowledgeable about planning, scheduling, and time management. Human leadership is characterized by an emphasis on human relationships, interpersonal competence, and instrumental motivational strategies which provide support, encouragement, and growth opportunities. The substantive leader is described as a clinical practitioner who diagnoses substantive problems and can recommend and implement solutions. This dimension is what distinguishes leadership from one type of organization to another, the educator from the hospital administrator, for example.

The remaining two forces, symbolic and cultural, are considered necessary for excellence. Symbolic leadership is seen in such activities as visiting workplaces, seeking out and visibly spending time with organizational members, downplaying management concerns, presiding over ceremonies and rituals, and providing a unified vision of the organization through words and actions. The culture of an organization, according to Sergiovanni, is a constructed reality and leaders play a key role in developing this reality. The leader works to create shared norms, expectations, common meanings, and assumptions, all of which guide the behaviors of organizational members.

The description of John Meyer and Garvin School provides a large data base for hueristically assessing Sergiovanni's

model. John Meyer's leadership can be described in terms of the forces proposed by Sergiovanni. Meyer's management of time, people, and resources is refined to the point that he spends little conscious effort accomplishing the technical aspects of his job. His delegation of scheduling and budgetary tasks to responsible members of the organization is an example. His organized system for remaining in control of the requests for his time and efforts is another example of his technical leadership.

Meyer's human leadership skills have improved through the years. The descriptor "mellowed" came up time and again during interviews with people who had worked with John Meyer during the first years at Garvin until the present.

Both the technical and human leadership skills are skills which Meyer has refined over time. These skills are similar to the "task" oriented, "initiating structure" behaviors and the "relationship" oriented, "consideration" behaviors described in many leadership theories. However, it is obvious in this study of John Meyer and Garvin School that it required more than these skills to cause Garvin School to be identified as a "turnaround" school, brought from the "armpit of the district" to a school recognized for its exemplary programs and achievements.

What is evident in the study is that John Meyer possessed other skills which helped Garvin School "turn around" in scores on achievement tests, in discipline, and in

other dimensions. Meyer is well acquainted with the substantive aspects of schooling. He is knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction, child development, teaching strategies, staff development, and supervision and evaluation of staff. He seeks new information that could provide the staff with additional methods for teaching students and meeting individual needs. He communicates that information to staff.

Beyond his abilities relative to the technical, human, and substantive issues, John Meyer engaged in symbolic activities which helped to build the culture of Garvin School. This process took ten to twelve years to accomplish. These symbolic actions and the building of a culture help explain the nuances and subtleties of Meyer's leadership that are not adequately described by the technical, human, and substantive skills. Meyer visits the classrooms, the cafeteria, the playground, and the teachers' lounge. He supports the building of traditions at Garvin and takes an active role in developing rituals that are performed daily, monthly, and yearly. He begins each day with announcements and the Pledge of Allegiance over the intercom. He involves the families in the enterprise of schooling when he calls the parents at home or at work to inform them that their child was the "good news" student that day. He supports the staff at Garvin with his Friday classroom visits to award pencils to the students who have completed all their work for the

week. He is actively involved in the yearly reading program and involves parents in the program by requiring a signed contract agreeing that a special time will be set aside daily for reading. The annual visit of the Headless Horseman is another Garvin School tradition that is important to staff, students, and community.

Meyer also carefully works to construct the reality that he sees as vital for the students at Garvin to succeed. He stresses to the students the importance of using their abilities, of doing their best in all endeavors, and of realizing that one person can make a difference in their lives. They are told that they also have a responsibility to make a difference in someone else's life. He models his positive regard for the child when he stops in the hallway to hear a child's tale of weekend baseball accomplishments. He states his belief and models it daily that the children at Garvin can learn and can succeed. He is consistent in his expression of beliefs that the school can make a difference in the lives of children, and that what is best for the children should guide decision making. It was this leadership that one teacher was referring to when she asked the investigator "How can you really capture the flavor of what goes on here?"

This study of a "turnaround" school, of John Meyer and what he did to accomplish that "turnaround", provides a heuristic way of assessing the model of leadership forces

proposed by Sergiovanni. This study indicates that the model is a realistic perspective on leadership.

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